The nineteenth century was a period of violent upheaval in the northern savanna and Ethiopia. From Senegambia in the west to the Red Sea in the east, the series of holy wars (jihads) that began in 1804 transformed most of this region, and slavery played a vital role in the transformation. The increased importance of slavery is evident in the export figures for slaves – 1,650,000 slaves sold north across the Sahara Desert and the Red Sea – but the jihads resulted in the enslavement of millions of other people who were settled within the new states. This led to a more intensive use of slaves in production, which further consolidated a political economy in which slavery was crucial and in that sense constituted a slave mode of production.

Increased slave use was related to two factors. First, some areas benefited from the export trade, which included not only slaves but steadily growing quantities of “legitimate” commodities. This expanding market for other merchandise, especially ostrich feathers, ivory, tanned skins, and gum arabic, was connected with the general economic growth of Europe in the nineteenth century. These commodities were taken across the Sahara, although gum arabic and peanuts were shipped from the Senegambia coast, and ivory and shea butter were exported via the Niger-Benue confluence. The second and most important factor was the expansion of the regional economies that were centered in the northern savanna itself. For the first time in centuries, there was no serious multiyear drought that undermined the economy, although drought still affected developments locally. Production in foodstuffs, livestock, textiles, and other manufactures expanded, especially in the new Islamic theocracies. A corresponding expansion occurred in commerce, with the result that the southern desert, the savanna, and the northern forest-zone were closely integrated, probably more so than ever before.
The Size of the Slave Population in the Savanna

By the end of the nineteenth century, 30 to 50 percent of the total population of the western Sudan was slave, and in some locations the percentage was higher, reaching 80 percent near some commercial centers (Table 9.1). These estimates are based on French efforts to assess the importance of slavery in the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century. The estimate for 1904 accounts for at least 382,800 slaves. There is no way of judging the extent to which the incidence of slavery had increased in the course of the nineteenth century, and it may well be that the proportion of slaves in the population at the end of the century was greater than 50 percent overall. Slave masters had many reasons to falsify information given to French census takers, and the censuses themselves were subject to tremendous error. Nonetheless, these data are essential to the reconstruction of the history of slavery. The scale of slavery alone was so great that the productive employment of slaves was the most important aspect of the institution during the century.

In the central Sudan, the incidence of slavery was on the same order as in the western Sudan, although there are no census data comparable to the French records. The largest and most populous state in the central Sudan – the Sokoto Caliphate – had a substantial slave population – a conclusion reached from widely scattered information. In the capital districts of Sokoto and Gwandu, the overwhelming majority of inhabitants were slaves, whereas in the populous emirates of Kano and Zaria, perhaps 50 percent of the population was slave, at least by the end of the century. A similar pattern prevailed elsewhere; slaves came to form a considerable part of the population of Nupe and Adamawa after mid-century – they comprised the majority of people near the capitals of these emirates. Even smaller emirates, including Liptako in the far west and Hadejia on the border with Borno in the east, had large numbers of slaves. Throughout the Sokoto Caliphate, the slave population tended to be concentrated near the major towns and along trade routes, and as these developed in the course of the century, the slave population expanded too.

Concentrations of slaves were also found in the Nilotic Sudan and parts of the Ethiopian highlands. Again, the nineteenth century witnessed an unprecedented growth in slavery. In the Nilotic Sudan, slaves – already numerous around Sennar – became common along the river north of the Nile confluence. In the southern slaving grounds, local societies were totally restructured as slave armies and slave settlements spread south and southwest. Eventually this trend affected the Zande country and other parts of the northern Congo River basin, and events traceable to the Nilotic Sudan reverberated as far west as Borno, which fell to the army of Rabeh Fadlallah, a Jellaba by origin, in 1891. In Ethiopia too, slavery became more prevalent, especially in the southern Galla towns, which grew with the influx of new slaves. Even in the Christian highlands, slaves were numerous.
Table 9.1. Demographic Profile of Slave Populations in the Western Sudan, 1904

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative district</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>Children %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>44.1</td>
<td>23.3</td>
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<td>47.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<td>36.2</td>
<td>26.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>31.3</td>
<td>43.8</td>
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<td>40.2</td>
<td>31.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dori</td>
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<td>39,865</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>47.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gao</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumbu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>46.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaedi</td>
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<td>22.2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>61.5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
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<td>53.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>27.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
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<td>36.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
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<td>34.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yatenga</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>7,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>346,800*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excludes Gao and Gumbu.

The availability of slaves made possible the more extensive use of slaves in production, especially in agriculture but also in other activities. Slaves lived on plantations or in their own villages near all the major commercial centers. War captives were settled in defensible positions to provide the agricultural and manufacturing foundation for economic development, with the result that the metropolitan districts of the major states imported slaves en masse. Merchants too participated in this expansion; they settled slaves at the towns along the established trade routes of the savanna and used slave labor to open new routes that stretched beyond the borders of the major states. In some cases, the output of slave labor was coordinated to supply armies and palace staffs, whereas in others, harvests were sold on the market or used to feed itinerant merchants.

The expansion of the plantation sector, based on the regeneration of the centuries-old system dating back to the medieval era, began with the reorganization of the political economy in the northern savanna during the early decades of the nineteenth century. This first phase ended roughly at mid-century. During this phase, the relatively densely populated areas of the Senegambia, middle Niger valley, Hausaland, and the northern Nilotic Sudan experienced an increase in the slave population, although there were large areas between these regions where slavery remained marginal and population density low. During the second phase, from 1850 to 1900 (and in some places, lasting even later), new centers of slave concentration were opened, generally to the south of the earlier developments. In these decades, the upper Niger region, the Benue River valley and neighboring parts of the Niger valley, and the southern basin of the Nile were incorporated into this expanded slave-based productive system. A subsidiary expansion also occurred along the desert edge. In some places, it began in the early part of the century, but it experienced dramatic growth in the closing decades of the century, especially in the western Sudan.

**The Western Sudan**

The legacy of *jihad* was an important factor in the history of the far-western Sudan. The rivalry between Muslim reformers and the old warrior elite had already led to war in the eighteenth century. Futa Jallon and Futa Toro were the successful products of this struggle; but an outbreak along the Gambia in the 1790s failed, as did another revolt in Walo and Kay or in 1830. In the middle Niger region, however, the caliphate of Hamdullahi was established in 1818. An even more important uprising began under al-Hajj ‘Umar in 1852 and spread throughout the region from the foothills of Futa Jallon to the middle Niger valley, while another movement under Ma Ba operated in Senegambia after 1861. In the 1870s, Samori led another movement in the upper Niger basin, so that by the closing decades of the nineteenth century virtually the whole of the western Sudan was in the hands of Muslim reformers. Based on the results of these *jihads*, the western Sudan comprised three subregions: first, the Senegambia and Futa Jallon; second, the area incorporated into Segu...
Tukulor as a consequence of the jihad of al-Hajj 'Umar; and third, the upper Niger basin that came largely within Samori’s sphere of influence.

In 1806, the first ruler of Futa Toro, Abd el-Kader, was deposed. A conservative, landowning aristocracy was determined to reap the rewards of the successful struggle of the 1770s; the expansive phase of jihad was terminated, thereby setting the stage for the exploitation of slaves and free peasants who worked the land along the river. Until 1860, most slave holdings appear to have been relatively small; farmers were considered wealthy if they owned a slave or two. Thereafter, the slave market was saturated with fresh imports from the interior, and average holdings increased. In the French census of 1904, slaves accounted for at least 20 percent of the population; there were 38,600 slaves reported, although it is likely that this figure was an undercount. About 35 percent of these slaves had been born in Futa Toro; many other people who were second- and third-generation slaves could easily be disguised from the inquisitive French agents.

Elsewhere in Senegambia, the struggle between the old tyeddo class of warriors and the Muslim reformers resulted in the extension of Muslim communities and the increase in the number of slaves. According to British reports in 1894, slaves outnumbered free men two to one among the Malinke communities along the Gambia. The French census of 1904, which came after long interaction between local societies and French colonialism, also showed large numbers of slaves, although the French were only able to account for a portion of the slave population of Senegambia in the census of 1904. Local knowledge of French antislavery sentiments had resulted in extensive concealment of the actual situation. Nonetheless, one-third the population of Sine-Saalum was identified as slave. The Kaymor area of southern Saalum was one area of relatively high slave concentration. The Muslim population there was largely involved in agriculture and used slave labor. An important trade route passed near the coast. Salt from the pans formed by an inlet from the Atlantic was sold south to the Gambia River and then inland; grain and cotton were grown extensively, and textile production fed the same trade route.

The growth of peanut exports after mid-century encouraged the importation of slaves to be used in agriculture, although some of the expansion involved the movement of free, migrant farmers and escaped slaves into the regions too. Peanuts were first exported from the Gambia River in the 1830s; by 1840, the Gambia exported 1,100 tons; the figure rose to 8,500 tons in 1848. By the 1850s, areas to the north also became significant producers; Senegal exported 5,400 tons in 1854, whereas Gambian exports were already 11,000 tons by then. This expansion continued, especially in Senegal, until the 1880s, when the worldwide economic depression resulted in a fall in price and the temporary decline in the volume of the trade. In 1882, Senegal sold more than 80,000 tons, and in 1884, Gambia sold almost 18,000 tons, although this grand-total peak of 98,000 tons was not attained again until the 1890s. By then, the completion of the Saint Louis–Dakar railway (1885) and relief from the cycles in
the global economy encouraged peanut cultivation once again. This last phase of expansion was directly related to the influx of slaves into the area along the railway in Kajoor and western Bawol.9

There were few economies of scale in the cultivation of peanuts, so large slave owners had no particular advantage over small producers. Consequently, the growth of the trade encouraged peasant production. Free migrant farmers were traveling to the Gambia from the 1840s on, and they also moved into Kajoor a few decades later when the expansion spread there. In 1851, the British governor of the Gambia estimated that migrants produced one-third of the export crop, and although estimates for the role of peasants in the production of peanuts in other areas are not available, their contribution to total output was significant.10 The origins of these migrants are not clear; some may have been of slave background, whereas others may have moved west to escape the wars in the interior. Despite the importance of the peasant sector, slave labor was also essential to the expansion of peanut production. The proportion of slaves in the population was high in precisely those areas that were most involved in the export trade: the Gambia River valley, Sine-Saalum, Kajoor, and the Senegal valley.

Whereas peasant production and slave-based agriculture were both common in the Senegambia basin, plantations continued to dominate the economy of Futa Jallon, as they had in the last decades of the eighteenth century. In 1820, René Caillié reported numerous plantations, which he called ouronde (runde), in the parts of Futa Jallon he visited on his journey into the interior. For example, near Gneretemile was “an ouronde, or slave village, surrounded by good plantations of bananas, cotton, cassavas and yams, [while after] Maraca . . . we found ourselves in a sandy plain, containing several small slave villages.” Two days’ journey from the capital of Timbo was the plantation of Popoco, “containing between one hundred and fifty and two hundred slaves, who are employed in agriculture.”11 These slaves grew cassava, yams, peanuts, rice, and millet. He passed many others as well, and spent some time at Cambaya, the village of the caravan leader Ibrahim, with whom he was travelling. He accompanied Ibrahim to his rice plantation:

to see the slaves employed in preparing the ground for sowing. The poor slaves work entirely naked, exposed to the heat of the burning sun. The presence of the master intimidates them, and the fear of punishment expedites the work; but they make themselves amends in his absence. The women, who had very little clothing, had their children tied to their backs. They were employed in collecting dry grass, which, being burnt, forms a kind of manure, indeed, the only kind they use.12

These slaves had their own huts, where the older women prepared food for the field hands. Behind these huts were small gardens that belonged to the slaves and from which they were expected to feed themselves. The slaves were allowed two days per week to work in their own gardens. The only major distinction between Ibrahim’s plantation and many others in Futa Jallon was
that he was a private merchant, not associated with the Fulbe aristocracy who owned the vast majority of slaves in the country.

Demographic data collected in Futa Jallon after slavery had been abolished and many slaves had fled provide a sufficiently large sample of plantations to give some idea of the size and number of slave holdings. Of the 34,600 people in the province of Labe in the 1940s, there were 11,300 people who still lived in villages that had once been plantations. In the language of the colonial period, these inhabitants were no longer called slaves, but “serfs.” These 11,300 “serfs” were settled on 121 “roundes,” or plantations, an average of 93 people per plantation. In the past, the percentage of slaves in the total population had been much higher, perhaps reaching two-thirds. Furthermore, the size of individual plantations had certainly been greater. When these data are put together with earlier accounts, they confirm the existence of a highly developed plantation economy. The plantation slaves, moreover, were not assimilated in the full sense of that term. Otherwise, they would not have been recognizable in distinct communities as late as the 1940s.

The Maraka and Juula towns of the middle Niger valley were also centers of plantation agriculture, with slave populations sometimes as high as 70 to 80 percent of the total population in the immediate vicinity of the towns. Their prosperity depended on the ecologically based trade that stretched from the Sahara Desert to the forests. Salt, livestock, and imports from North Africa came from the north, while kola nuts, gold, and European imports came from the south. Grain and textiles, produced locally by slaves, entered this regional commercial network. Another route westward to the Senegal and Gambia valleys was an alternative avenue to the coast and became particularly important in the nineteenth century as a result of, firstly, the jihad of al-Hajj ‘Umar and secondly, the military expansion of the French. These towns served as staging points for caravans to the south and west, and they were the wholesale centers for imports from the north.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, before al-Hajj ‘Umar conquered Segu Bambara and transformed this pagan state into the reformed Muslim state of Segu Tukulor, Sinsani was the most important of several Maraka and Juula towns. The integration of its plantation sector and regional trade was typical of the commercial life of the region as a whole. Slave-produced grain was sold to visiting merchants from the sahel, who brought salt from Ijil, while cotton fed the local textile industry. Sinsani was destroyed in 1861, and its trade shifted to the new center at Banamba. Nonetheless, even in its period of decline, the slave population was still substantial. In 1904, the French were able to count 6,436 slaves at Sinsani, which represented 31 percent of the population. Popular tradition remembers the more glorious past, when some slave owners were credited with substantial holdings, as many as 3,000 slaves in some cases. Although these figures cannot be verified, they probably are an accurate indication of the importance of the plantation sector in the period before 1861.
As the successor to Sinsani, Banamba grew rapidly because slaves were imported from the south. In 1864, the town already had 8,000 to 9,000 people and rapidly became the commercial center of Segu Tukulor, just as Sinsani had been the commercial center of Segu Bambara. The wars of Segu Tukulor accounted for many slaves brought into the region in the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1880s, Samori, Tiéba, and Babemba enslaved thousands of people, and these captives were sold north, where many were added to the holdings of the merchants from Banamba and other towns. By the 1890s, plantations surrounded Banamba for a distance of 25–50 km, and the slave population outnumbered the free inhabitants by a ratio of two to one. Although the number of slaves is not known, estimates in 1910 indicate that 20,000 slaves fled from the region of Banamba and Tuba, which may have been half the slave population of the area. Tuba, a town of 3,000, had an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 slaves in its outlying plantations, so that the slave population of Banamba may have been on the order of 30,000 to 35,000. Other towns – at least those that the French officers tried to tabulate – show a similar pattern. Kiba, a town with 2,300 people, had a plantation sector of 5,000 slaves. The district of Segu, which was al-Hajj ‘Umar’s capital, had a population 53 percent slave in 1894, which indicates that there were about 70,000 slaves in the Segu area. Taken together, the slave population of the middle Niger Valley must have been significantly higher than 100,000.

The area to the immediate north, particularly around Gumbu and Sokolo, was not as densely populated, but the ratio of slave to free was about the same. Sokolo had more slaves than free people in 1894; there were at least 13,300 slaves in 1904. Gumbu had about the same proportion of slaves and free. The area as a whole had some 24,000 slaves, whereas in Gumbu itself, 30 families owned 1,700 slaves between them. Some holdings were as large as 100 to 200, but there were many small holdings of 10 slaves or fewer. Considering the mass exodus of slaves from this region in the 1890s and first few years of the twentieth century, it is clear that the size of the slave population was still considerable.

In 1818, Sheku Ahmadu and his supporters – many of whom were Fulbe – defeated the Bambara warlords of the interior Niger delta and established an Islamic state, with its capital at Hamdullahi. The state lasted until 1862, when al-Hajj ‘Umar destroyed Hamdullahi and incorporated much of its territory in Masina into Segu Tukulor, although a smaller successor state was founded to the east of Hamdullahi at Bandiagara. Segu Tukulor controlled much of the interior delta as far north as Timbuktu and south to Jenne. The economic development of the state relied on the exploitation of slave labor, based on farming state lands, and the taxation of peasants, who were forced to work in the fields set aside by the government. Slaves had varying obligations, depending on the productivity of their location and the owner. Sometimes masters took a quantity of grain equivalent to a man’s annual subsistence. Occasionally, slaves were expected to pay twice the subsistence amount. Usually slaves worked five
Slavery in the Savanna During the Era of the Jihads

days on the master’s land and two days on land set aside for their own use. The output of those slaves who worked for the state went directly into the state treasury; private slaves were taxed indirectly through levies on their masters in lieu of military service and communal taxes. The government was the largest owner of slaves, but merchants still had a substantial number. In the Timbuktu area, particularly in the most northerly part of the delta, slave communities already existed before Ahmadu’s *jihad*. Timbuktu slave owners depended on these communities for part of their grain supplies, because Timbuktu itself was not able to support much agricultural production. At Jenne, to the south, there were also many slaves, if the 1904 estimates of slave populations are any indication. In 1904, there were 15,000 to 16,000 slaves in the Jenne area. The prosperity of the Masina heartland ended with its incorporation into Segu Tukulor, and many of the slaves fled or were seized for resettlement elsewhere. The remnants of Hamdullahi at Bandiagara systematically devastated the western delta, thereby reducing the population further.21

A spectacular increase in the number of slaves took place further south, precisely in that region where there had been relatively few concentrations of slaves in the early nineteenth century. A number of Juula reformers in Wasulu, Konyan, Toron, Worodugu, and other areas in the upper Niger valley attempted to seize power. This Juula revolution culminated in the creation of a Samorian state in the 1870s and 1880s. In each case, enslavement, slave trading, and the settlement of slaves for productive uses were essential policies of the Juula revolutionaries. Preexisting towns and Muslim communities were generally absorbed into this movement for political consolidation, so that established centers of plantation agriculture expanded too.

Among those existing Muslim towns that survived the Juula revolution was Kankan, located inland from Futa Jallon and associated with the kola trade between the forest and northern savanna. The fertile plain around the town (population: 6,000 in 1820) was the location of slave settlements: “In every direction there are small villages, or ourondes [*runde*], for the slaves. These villages are orchards to the country, for they are surrounded by fine plantations, where yams, maize, rice, foigne [*fonio*], onions, pistachio-nuts [*peanuts*], and gombo are grown in abundance.”22 The masters generally lived in Kankan, traveling to their plantations to supervise the work. Planters obtained their slaves in Kissi country in the south in exchange for gunpowder, muskets, and textiles. The Kankan planters not only provisioned the caravan traffic in kola and other goods; they also sold some produce to the gold fields of Buré to the north – where slaves worked the gold, as they had for centuries.23 Caillié was of the opinion that a man “who possesses a dozen slaves may live at his ease without travelling, merely by taking the trouble to superintend them.”24 The continued importance of Kankan as a commercial center demonstrates that many slave holders in Kankan did more than merely manage their slaves; as late as 1904, the French still found a large slave population in the region, and in Kankan itself there were 6,000 slaves and 4,500 free men, or 57 percent
Unfortunately, there is no estimate of the size of the plantation sector around Kankan, although it must have included tens of thousands of slaves. Kankan was eventually absorbed into the Samorian state.

One of the more successful of the early reformers was Vakaba Toure, who was a craftsman by origin. In 1848, his armed following established the small state of Kabadugu, with its capital at Odienne, in northwestern Ivory Coast. By the time Vakaba died in 1858, slavery had become the central pillar of Kabadugu society. Slaves lived in villages of their own or at temporary camps on the plantations of the aristocracy. Estimates from 1898 indicate that free men inhabited only 8 of the 104 villages in the state; slaves numbered 12,000 in a total population of 19,000. The king alone reportedly owned 4,500 slaves, scattered in 34 villages owned exclusively by the royal family and another 26 villages in which other proprietors also had slaves.

In the 1860s, the Juula revolution found a strong leader in Samori, whose wars soon engulfed Konyan and Wasulu. By 1874, Samori controlled a large area south of Kankan, and by 1879, he dominated the whole of the upper Niger basin. Two years later, Kabadugu and Kankan were incorporated. The Samorian state now bordered Futa Jallon in the west and Segu Tukulor in the north. The Samorian economy relied on the proceeds from the sale of slaves north, which financed the importation of horses and other goods, whereas contacts with the coast enabled the purchase of firearms. Samori’s armies enslaved so many people that it was possible to finance this foreign trade and also settle slaves on plantations. The slave populations of Kankan and Kabadugu were supplemented, and new centers of production were established. The most important was near Bissandugu, located south of Kankan, which became Samori’s capital. Because Samori came into conflict with the French in the 1880s, he was forced to evacuate the Bissandugu region, and consequently the plantation sector was dismantled and it was not possible to reassemble it in its entirety in the lands Samori conquered further east. Nonetheless, it is clear that Samori tried to establish an economic base for his state that relied on slave labor. Political conditions made him rely on enslavement and the sale of slaves to an extent that maintained slave supplies for much of West Africa into the 1890s.

Sikasso and Kong, two rivals of the Samorian state, were also centers of slavery. Sikasso successfully maintained its independence, and, under the dynamic leadership of Tiéba, expanded its slave holdings. When the French examined Sikasso in 1904, they found that two-thirds of the population was slave, which indicates that plantations were as common there as elsewhere. Kong was not as fortunate as Sikasso in maintaining its independence; during the eastward exodus, Samori leveled the town, just as al-Hajj ‘Umar had had to destroy Sinsani because of local opposition. Nonetheless, the remains of its slave economy were still evident in 1904. There were an estimated 180,000 slaves and 223,000 free men in the Kong region, or 45 percent slaves – for the region as a whole. In areas immediately around Kong and Bandama (the two main centers in the cercle), however, the percentage of slaves approached 80 percent.

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In areas between Kong and the middle Niger valley – along the trade route north from Asante to Jenne and Timbuktu – the same pattern of slavery prevailed, although this area was not consolidated into a state during the nineteenth century. At Bobo-Julasso, slaves formed two-thirds of the population;\(^1\) Wa, Buna, and other towns had large numbers of slaves, too. Information is most complete on Buna, a town that had 10,000 people in 1889. There were about 100 slave settlements (djoso) around Buna, all within a radius of 10–30 km from the town. The largest had populations ranging from 200 to 300 people, each under the management of a trusted slave or relative of the owner. The town, divided into different wards for the aristocracy, merchants, and indigenous commoners, had between 3,500 and 4,500 slaves; 2,000 of these slaves belonged to the aristocracy, and the merchants owned most of the others.\(^2\) Although the total population of the plantation sector is not known, Holden has been able to estimate that 60 of the plantations in the area had a combined population of 2,700 slaves – an average of 45 per estate.\(^3\) In his sample, plantations ranged in size from 20 to 100 slaves, which are smaller than the estates reported by Boutillier. It may well be that the total slave population in the Buna area approached 10,000. Besides their employment in agriculture, the slaves of Buna were also used in the production of gold.

The Central Sudan

The region between the middle Niger valley and the Lake Chad basin had many similarities with the area farther west. Muslim holy war was again the dynamic political force, in this case the jihad led by Usman dan Fodio and his family. There were many towns in the vast territory from Timbuktu in the west to the Cameroon highlands in the east. These towns usually had populations of only a few thousand, but a few were much larger. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the heaviest concentration of these towns was in the Hausa country and included Sokoto, Gwandu, Birnin Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Zaria, and many more – at least several hundred. Elsewhere, towns were more scattered, but an extensive network of trade routes connected them, so that there was a string of towns radiating outward from the center of the Caliphate and from secondary pockets of political and economic concentration elsewhere.

Heinrich Barth, the learned classical scholar and Arabist, spent several years in the Sokoto Caliphate in the early 1850s as an ambassador for the British government. During this time, he learned several local languages, including Hausa, the principal tongue of the caliphate, and acquired a knowledge of local history, economy, and society that was unsurpassed by contemporary European observers of Africa. His observations tended to be conservative, and even his mild antislavery sentiments were subdued in his broader effort to portray African Islamic civilization in a favorable light. Nevertheless, he estimated the percentage of slaves in the population of Kano, the largest and most prosperous province in the Sokoto Caliphate, as at least 50 percent of the entire
Transformations in Slavery

Population. In other parts of the caliphate, similar proportions of slave to free were often found, and, as was the case in Kano, many of these slaves were located on plantations. Thus the Emir of Yola, a provincial capital to the southeast of Kano, had “all his slaves settled in rumde or slave villages, where they cultivate grain for his use or profit.” At Ngaundere, a district capital under Yola, population estimates taken during the colonial period still revealed this basic pattern of slave concentration. At Ngaundere itself, there were 6,400 free Fulbe and 6,700 slaves, whereas in the district as a whole, there were 16,450 free Fulbe, 20,000 slaves, and 14,300 independent, free peasants. These three cases, Kano, Yola, and Ngaundere, are taken here as examples of the dozens of provinces and districts in the Sokoto Caliphate where high concentrations of slaves were found. The figures from the 1850s and from the twentieth century demonstrate the scale of slavery and the persistence of servile traits that have made possible the reconstruction of the development of this slave society.

Some jihad leaders envisioned an economy based on commercial expansion, and commerce depended on agricultural and craft production. The aristocracy looked to the merchant class for entrepreneurial skills; therefore, the merchants were protected in their movements. They pushed southeastward into and then beyond the Cameroon highlands; their operations to Asante and the Yoruba states increased in volume. Caliphate textiles and leather goods were exported over a wide area, whereas the importation of salt from the Sahara and neighboring Borno brought areas that were nominally independent under the economic hegemony of the Caliphate. Under the policies of the Caliphate government, Hausa society became associated with the mercantile and craft community, which was identified as free and commoner. Even in those parts of the caliphate away from Hausaland, Hausa settlers dominated these occupations. Hausa commerce had been important before the nineteenth century, but supported by political consolidation, Hausa merchants became more numerous in much of the region bounded by the Benue River valley, the middle and Upper Volta region, and the Lake Chad basin.

Slaves provided much of the labor for the new Fulbe ruling class and the Hausa merchants and craftsmen. Aristocrats employed slaves as messengers, retainers, and domestic servants, often in greater numbers than necessary. Male slaves were also drafted into the army, whereas females filled the harems of the wealthiest officials. Because palace establishments were often very large, many women were also needed to prepare and cook food. Merchants relied on slave agents, stock boys, and common laborers. Long and arduous caravan journeys required lots of work. At each caravan stop, animals had to be unloaded, fed, and watered; meals had to be cooked; and camp had to be prepared for the night. Slaves did these jobs in most cases. In town, merchants needed agents to sit in the market or hawk goods in the street and countryside, and water, firewood, and fodder had to be carried. Although slaves also performed menial tasks for other craftsmen, slavery was particularly important in textile production. As in the western Sudan, female slaves carded and spun cotton while male slaves...
wove. Slaves either worked for their masters or on their own account, often paying a weekly fee to their masters instead. Hence the craftsmen – including tailors, dyers, and cloth beaters – owned relatively few slaves. But many slaves were employed in textile production. There were approximately 50,000 dyers occupied at some 15,000 dye pits in the Kano area alone at the end of the nineteenth century, and a large proportion of the slave population had to be engaged in spinning and weaving to supply this industry.\textsuperscript{39}

Despite the use of slaves in aristocratic households, merchant firms, and craft production, the most important contribution of slaves was in agriculture. Millet, sorghum, indigo, and cotton were the main crops grown on lands watered by the annual rains; onions, tobacco, indigo, and vegetables were cultivated on irrigated plots during the dry season. As was the case in the western Sudan, plantations were common, although wealthy farmers owned slaves in small numbers too. Polly Hill is probably correct in stating that most slave owners in the central parts of the caliphate were small holders.\textsuperscript{40} Nonetheless, most agricultural slaves were on the large estates of the aristocracy and merchant class.

The growth of the plantation sector occurred in two stages that corresponded with similar developments further west. In the first half of the century, most plantation development occurred in the northern parts of the savanna – near the core cities of Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Gwandu, and Zaria. This phase corresponded to the growth of plantations near the established commercial centers of the western Sudan, which were located along the middle Niger valley, in Futa Jallon, and in the Senegambia region. In the second half of the century, the areas of plantation development spread to the Benue River valley (Yola) and neighboring areas near the confluence of the Niger and Benue (Nupe and Ilorin), although new plantations continued to be established in the core area, which gradually expanded outward, during this second phase too. This consolidation of a plantation sector in the southern parts of the savanna was similar to the expansion of the plantation system into the areas established by Samori and also Odienne and Kabadugu. Some emirates were exceptions to this general southern extension of plantations. Bauchi (southeast of Kano) developed earlier than Yola and effectively became associated with metropolit an Hausaland, whereas Liptako (west of the Niger) was in the northern part of the savanna but as a frontier region developed after the core emirates.\textsuperscript{41}

Sokoto and Gwandu, together with Wurno, Jega, and other towns, were established in the river valleys of western Hausaland in the heartlands of the old states of Kebbi and Gobir. The intensity of the fighting in this area resulted in the displacement of virtually the whole population. Many people were enslaved; many more slaves were accepted as tribute from other emirates in the caliphate. By the end of the nineteenth century, these valleys were densely inhabited, and slaves comprised the great majority of the population. In neighboring Zamfara, the slave population was less because the indigenous inhabitants stayed. Nonetheless, around Talata Mafara, Kaura Namoda, and other
towns, plantations were also common. With its relatively high proportion of peasants, Zamfara remained the exception in the central caliphate.

Kano, Katsina, and Zaria – the other large emirates in the central part of the caliphate – were also densely populated, and slaves formed upward of 50 percent of the population. Kano was surrounded by 40 walled towns within a radius of 50 km. Most people in Katsina emirate lived in the city, in an area southeast of the city that bordered Kano emirate, or in extreme southern Katsina (west of Kano). The population of Zaria was largely confined to the city and numerous towns on the northern border with Kano emirate. There were plantations in all these areas.

The earliest developments occurred in the Hausa region that became the center of the caliphate. The Muslim reformers assumed ownership of the land seized in the jihad, so that as the old governments were displaced, the peasants found themselves tenants on the vast holdings of the victors. Furthermore, many people were enslaved during the initial jihad (1804–1808) or in the rebellions that flared in Zamfara and elsewhere in 1817. Those who were slaves at the time of the jihad and did not flee to the camps of the Muslim reformers were reenslaved, whereas the war with Borno and the revolts of sympathizers beyond Hausaland resulted in more slaves. By 1820, the ideological phase of the war was over; the established governments had been overthrown in the name of Islam, and the way was set for the consolidation of Islamic government. Thereafter, jihad was largely confined to slave raiding as a means of expanding the frontiers of the caliphate and amassing slave labor for settlement within the caliphate.\(^42\)

The economic and social development of the caliphate is associated with the policies of Muhammad Bello, son of Usman dan Fodio and leader of the pragmatic faction in the jihad leadership.\(^43\) In contrast to Usman’s brother, Abdullahi, who shared power with Muhammad Bello through the creation of a dual caliphate, with centers at Gwandu and Sokoto, Muhammad Bello believed that only through the encouragement of trade and industry could the success of jihad be secured. Whereas Abdullahi wanted to continue fighting at almost any cost, in the expectation that the purification of the world would be rewarded in heaven, Muhammad Bello sought to regularize caliphate government. This required compromises with the Fulani clan leaders, who were not always the most devout Muslims but who had formed the backbone of the military. These clan leaders, together with truly religious leaders, became the landowners in whom Bello invested the future of the caliphate.

The scale of slave holdings in the central emirates can be assessed from the observations of Imam Imoru, the learned jurist and author whose knowledge of the Sokoto Caliphate, where he was born, and the Muslim centers along the trade routes to Asante, where he lived for many years, was extensive:

There are slave owners in Hausaland who have purchased 100 to 200 slaves, and there are some slave owners with 400 or 500 slaves. But in my lifetime, I have heard of only one person who was not an official, who had 1,000 slaves in Kano: his name was...
Kaushe,... In Hausaland, commoners buy slaves, but they are unable to buy 1,000 of them. Officials have more than 1,000 because they do not buy them: they seize them during war campaigns.44

Local tradition remembers Kaushe as the wealthiest merchant in Kano, but there were many others who had large holdings too – on the scale that Imoru claims.

The plantations of the aristocracy fell into three categories. First, individuals had private holdings. Second, estates were attached to particular offices. Third, aristocratic lineages owned estates collectively. M. G. Smith, in his analysis of the Zaria economy, identified fifty-one plantations (rinji) owned by the Zaria aristocracy around 1900.45 These ranged in size from small estates, such as the 40 slaves at Hanwa, a few kilometers from Zaria, to the huge one at Taban Sani, with its population of 3,000.46 The Emir of Kano had a number of plantations scattered throughout the countryside; the largest included estates at Nasarawa, just outside one of the city walls; at Fanisau, which also served as a country estate; and at Wudil, southwest of Kano. In Katsina, Tuareg and other merchants had plantations at Shibdawa, Doro, Ingawa, and other towns southeast of the city, whereas in the far southern part of the emirate enterprising merchants settled slaves to grow cotton and grain – the cotton being exported to southern Kano to supply the textile industry there; the grain entering desert-side trade.47

These developments marked the extension of the plantation system to the south. Bauchi was the first to benefit. The local Fulbe population already had dry-season camps, which were based around slave villages that grew foodstuffs for the nomadic population. These became the basis for the development of plantations that encouraged the settlement of nomads. There were at least fourteen Fulani plantation settlements in the Bauchi area before the jihad was won there; subsequently, slaves were settled around the emirate capital, and other towns that had their own plantations were founded or seized to the south, especially at Wase.48 These developments marked the extension of the plantation system to the south. Bauchi itself became a Hausa town, so that the concentration of population in its vicinity represented a cultural extension of Hausaland.

The major developments in the southern parts of the caliphate took place in Yola (in the east), Nupe (due south of Hausaland), and Ilorin (in the heart of the old Oyo state). In these three locations, slave raiding and frontier warfare resulted in the massive concentration of slaves. Yola, located on the Benue River near several Jukun states that had dominated the region since the sixteenth century at least, became the capital of the Emirate of Fombina (Adamawa), which geographically became the largest emirate in the caliphate. The Fulbe in the Benue valley were able to unite against a diverse population. The allegiance to Sokoto provided the basis of cooperation for widely scattered Fulbe clans which coalesced around the first Emir of Yola, Adamu, and successfully established a state. Yola was founded in the 1850s, the Fulani forces swept the
plains of the Benue valley clean of people, and then war captives were settled on plantations in the deserted savanna near Yola. Already by 1853, the Emir of Yola, Muhammad Lawal, had “all his slaves settled in rumde or slave villages where they cultivate grain for his use or profit.”49 Chomyel Abba, Doulabi, Golomba, Langui, Wuro Dole, Kirngabu, Konkol, Pette, and Yolel were new plantation villages near Yola that were settled after 1850, whereas nearly all the villages in Namtari, Girei, and Gurin districts were also slave plantations. In this way, the Yola region once again was populated, but the terms of occupancy were based on slavery.

In Nupe, a similar development occurred. The first capital of the jihad forces was at Raba, an important crossing point for caravans on the Niger River. But Raba was destroyed in the civil war that was associated with jihad in Nupe. When the capital was shifted to Bida in 1857, the center of political and economic development moved inland from the Niger valley to a more defensible position.51 While there may well have been plantations in the Raba period, the growth of slave settlements (tungazi) was truly astonishing after 1857. Virtually the whole of Nupe was slave, with the major settlement of war captives taking place between 1859 and 1895 (see Table 9.2). Many of these slave villages consisted of resettled Nupe prisoners, seized in the civil wars and forced to live under the new regime (see Table 9.3). Because they were culturally part of Nupe society, the terms of slavery appear to have been different than for slaves brought from elsewhere. Their terms of servitude involved tribute payments to particular aristocrats, which set these captives off from those slaves seized south of the Niger or bought from merchants coming from the north. Nonetheless, even this variation in slavery is instructive. The jihad leadership interpreted its mandate in terms of servitude. Subjugated people were expected to pay for their resistance; those who refused could be sold to traveling merchants.

The growth of the plantation sector in Nupe was a product of the policies of Emir Masaba (1859–1873), who followed the example of Muhammad Bello and the northern emirs in using slaves for economic development. Foreign demand for slaves still existed during Masaba’s reign, but he believed that slave labor could produce commodities in demand on the Niger River. European merchants had opened the Niger and Benue to direct trade with Europe by the late 1850s; shea butter – wanted for its oil – and peanuts were the “legitimate” goods exported from Nupe. Between 1864 and 1879, shea butter exports rose from less than 7 tons to almost 1,500 tons, and by the first decade of the twentieth century, the volume exceeded 8,000 tons. Peanuts became important more slowly; by the first decade of the twentieth century, exports varied between 500 and 2,000 tons per year; in the previous two decades, peanut sales were nowhere near as important as in the Senegambia region.52

The importance of slavery in the Ilorin area is more difficult to assess, but the trend there appears to have been similar to the pattern in Nupe and Yola. Ilorin emerged triumphant in the 1830s. The old city of Oyo was destroyed,
and the massive flight of Oyo refugees that had begun a decade and more earlier left the area to the west of Ilorin deserted. Ilorin pursued the jihad against the Yoruba states in the south, and captives were settled around Ilorin to repopulate the northern Yoruba country. Ilorin was the center of a thriving slave trade until the last decade of the nineteenth century; slaves were brought from further north, and Yoruba merchants from the south, who were granted immunity from the continuing hostilities, came to Ilorin to buy slaves.\(^53\) Although the development of a plantation economy around Ilorin was not as pronounced as in Nupe and Yola, there was no other means by which the population of Ilorin could have been promoted.

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*Includes Bini, Ebe, Gbedegi, Cekpa, Benu, Dibo, Agabi, Gwagba, and “Mokwa’.*

*Includes ‘Yoruba’, Yagba, Bunu, Akoko, and Igbomina.*

The Region East of Lake Chad

The agents of Islamic reform came later to the region east of Lake Chad. The dominant influence there was external – the Turkish regime in Egypt – and *jihad* became a significant factor only in the 1880s when local reaction against Egyptian colonialism coalesced in the Nilotic Sudan under the Mahdi. Nonetheless, the trend toward greater concentration of slaves and their use in production was similar to the pattern in the western and central Sudan, and the division between a northern phase – roughly before mid-century – and a southern expansion of slavery – in the second half of the century – was also similar. The initial expansion in productive slavery was centered in Wadai, Dar Fur, and the Nile valley above Sennar, but as slave raiding, ivory hunting, and political consolidation spread southward, slavery became more prevalent there too.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Wadai, Dar Fur, and the Funj Sultanate of Sennar were the centers of slavery. The concentrations of slaves in Dar Fur and Sennar had already been assembled in the eighteenth century. As late as 1825, the sultan’s garrison villages around Sennar – inhabited by slaves since the seventeenth century – had an estimated population of 30,000 while other aristocrats owned thousands of other slaves. In Dar Fur, the policy of settling slaves on Jabal Marra and elsewhere, which had been pursued by the sultans of the eighteenth century, continued. The influx of merchants from the Nile and the seizure of Kordofan from Sennar accelerated the accumulation of slaves. Wadai began a period of expansion in the first decade of the nineteenth century that resulted in the acquisition of slaves too. Benefiting from the war between Borno and the Sokoto Caliphate, the Wadai army marched on Bagirmi, which had been a dependency of Borno. This initiated a general push toward the south, which allowed the Wadai state to export slaves and other goods across the Sahara via a new trade route opened in the nineteenth century. Under the reign of Muhammad Ali (1858–1874), 12,000 to 15,000 people from Bagirmi were brought to Abeche, the Wadai capital. Many of these people were slaves already, but even those who technically were free men suffered. The Wadai sultan also had slave settlements scattered throughout the ten districts of the country.

The major changes occurred along the Nile valley after the Turko-Egyptian conquest of Sennar in 1820. Whereas slaves were already numerous around Sennar, there were few slaves to the north of the Nile confluence. In the Shaiqiya country, for example, there were hardly any slaves, in sharp contrast to the capital. At the time of the Egyptian conquest, there were only 4,500 slaves between Wadi Haifa and the Fourth Cataract, amounting to approximately 4 percent of the population. By the end of the nineteenth century, slaves constituted a third of the population.

The injection of vast numbers of slaves into the riverine districts was a consequence of Egyptian policies. In the quest for slave recruits for the Egyptian
army from 1820 to 1840, new captives became so numerous that the domestic market was flooded. Egyptian soldiers were often paid in slaves, who were then sold; occasionally, military expeditions were so successful that it was impossible to export all the captives. The Egyptian government also accepted slaves as payment for taxes, although eventually coin largely replaced slaves in this capacity. Sometimes, government forces simply commandeered slaves when it was necessary to fill export quotas. All of these measures assured the increased circulation of slaves within Sudanese society, so that an institution that had once been controlled by the Funj aristocracy now became common among merchants and small landholders.18

After 1840, the Sudanese were able to supply the slave market themselves, so that the role of Egyptian military expeditions declined in importance. At the time of the conquest, the indigenous merchants fled to the south, and as they
Transformations in Slavery

returned to their homes once the new regime demonstrated its intention to promote economic development, these merchants had consolidated commercial links that were essential in the expansion of the slave trade. The existing merchant class benefited from Egyptian rule to the extent that many individuals began to buy land along the river and settle slaves to farm. The introduction of improved irrigation devices, imported from Egypt, was associated with this agricultural expansion. Because irrigation devices were taxed, landowners were encouraged to exploit their land intensively, and the low price of slaves meant that slave labor expanded rapidly. By 1845, the region along the Blue Nile had come under extensive cultivation, for example. Dry-season cultivation of the river banks expanded with the construction of numerous waterwheels; wet-season cultivation away from the river was also extended.59

The new landowners did not rely exclusively on slave labor; a system of agricultural credit already existed that permitted speculators in grain to extend their control over the peasant communities. Known as sheil, this system allowed creditors to collect their debts at harvest time, but often debtors could not pay and had to agree to future labor services on the creditor’s land. Another traditional labor contract, teddan, gave the worker a fixed share of the crop, negotiated at the time of planting, but gradually contract workers lost out to slaves, who were not given the traditional compensation. Now contract workers were largely those who were in debt.

The consolidation of land holdings and the importation of slaves pushed many peasants off the land, particularly Danaqla, Shaiquiya, and Ja’aliyin peasants, who went south as merchants. They traveled throughout the Jellaba commercial network and returned north only if they acquired slaves and could purchase or reclaim land. These migrants usually left their women and children behind, in part because they could not afford to take them, considering the expense and risks involved in long-distance travel, and in part because the presence of women in the riverine communities protected the interests of their husbands and fathers in local land claims.

Slaves were also enrolled in the private armies of the merchant-adventurers who benefited most from Egyptian occupation, with its concern to acquire slaves for export to Egypt. Perhaps the most successful of these Jellaba was one Jali merchant, the famous al-Zubayr, who settled in the Bahr el Ghazal in 1856 with an army of 1,000 troops. His son, Sulaiman, had even more soldiers, an estimated 6,400 stationed at 31 zeribas in 1878.

Slaves were involved in agricultural production, both along the Nile River and in the zeriba country to the south and west. Al-Zubayr’s center at Daym Zubayr was surrounded by hundreds of farms and plantations. His ability to send thousands of slaves north through Kordofan depended on this agricultural production, as well as his commercial contacts with the Rizeiqat Arab nomads and the Zande principalities. Sulaiman consolidated this productive and commercial system further. At one center alone, he stationed a force of 1,500 soldiers, who maintained control over a subject population of 11,000.
farmers. This *zeriba* system stretched to Dar al-Kuti in the west and into Zande country to the southwest.\(^{60}\)

In the 1880s, the foreign occupation of the Nilotic Sudan temporarily ended, with the consolidation of the Mahdist state after 1884, but slavery continued to play an important role in the local economy. Indeed, the Mahdist state relied as heavily on slave labor as other reform governments across the savanna. The major change under the Mahdist state was the collapse of the export trade in slaves – effectively eliminated because of the British and Egyptian blockade. The termination of the trade meant, however, that slaves were now directed exclusively into the local economy. Even if the number of new captives decreased – and it seems likely that organized enslavement was on a smaller scale for military reasons – the incidence of slavery in the Nilotic Sudan did not fall off.\(^{61}\)

Furthermore, the armies of the *zeriba* system, many of which pledged their loyalty to the Mahdi, continued to operate, even though they could not export slaves and ivory as efficiently as had been possible under Turkish-Egyptian rule. Trade continued north through Wadai and Dar Fur, which allowed the importation of firearms necessary to maintain military supremacy. The result was a series of wars in the south. These culminated in the career of Rabeh Fadlallah, a disciple of the Mahdi, who swept across the area south of Wadai, seizing Bagirmi in the late 1880s and Borno in 1893. Rabeh too relied on slaves, but he never consolidated his rule sufficiently to establish a viable plantation economy.\(^{62}\)

The Ethiopian highlands participated in the general expansion in the incidence of slavery. The proximity of the area to the markets of Arabia and Egypt encouraged the continuation of the slave trade; the commercial domination of Muslim merchants meant that developments in the creation of a slave economy were similar to those that took place in the northern savanna, although *jihad* only affected the Somali coast in the last decade of the century and hence was not an important factor in most of the area.

The proportion of slaves in the general population of Christian Ethiopia and the various Galla and Muslim principalities was very high throughout the nineteenth century. In the province of Shoa in the 1840s, for example, “from the governor to the humblest peasant every house possesses slaves of both sexes, in proportion to the wealth of the proprietor.”\(^{63}\) The same was true in Jimma and Kaffa, two of the southern principalities, where at least half the population was slave. In 1897, it was reported that the slave population of Kaffa numbered \(80,000\).\(^{64}\) The most substantial holdings were those of the aristocracy, whether Christian or Muslim, with some officials reportedly possessing several thousand slaves.

These estimates, as scattered and rough as they are, help establish that slavery had been transformed in the northern savanna and at least in parts of the Ethiopian region. Slavery had become essential to production. Despite the ties to the outside world through the export of some “legitimate” commodities,
this transformation was essentially an internal development. Productive slavery was already an established feature of Muslim savanna society, but in the nineteenth century it expanded to an unprecedented level. Other forms of slavery, including the use of slaves in the military, government administration, and harems, continued too. Nonetheless, the exploitation of slave labor in production was the characteristic feature of the era.

The Organization of the Plantation Sector

The organization of the plantation sector included a variety of work regimes and management strategies. In some cases, slaves worked in a regimented fashion on the fields of the master under an overseer who was either slave or free. Plantation crops were the same throughout the savanna, there being more variations with latitude than between regions across the savanna. Cotton, indigo, tobacco, sorghum, bulrush millet, pepper, and vegetables were staple crops almost everywhere. Slaves usually had their own fields, too, which they worked during their spare time. In other cases, slaves lived in their own villages and were subject to fixed payments; in these less regimented arrangements, slaves sometimes worked a central field together but often farmed their own fields separately. Slave masters usually could extract more labor from slaves when tight management was maintained, but sometimes it was in the interest of the master to allow greater autonomy, especially over slaves born into captivity. Often labor obligations changed as slaves were assimilated, so that individual estates and villages could combine a number of work regimes.65

On most plantations in the Islamic states, slaves lived in their own quarters, working for their masters five or six days each week and occasionally the whole week.66 Usually, they were in the master’s field from sunrise until 2:00 p.m., these times coinciding with two of the five regular prayers said during the day by Muslims, as Hugh Clapperton, the British envoy to the Sokoto Caliphate in 1824, observed at Magaria, near Sokoto, where some Caliphate nobles had their estates:

When the time for cultivating the ground and sowing the seed comes on, the owner points out what he requires, and what is to be sown on it. The slave is then allowed to enclose a part for himself and family. The hours of labor, for his master, are from daylight until mid-day [2 p.m.]; the remainder of the day is employed on his own, or in any other way he may think proper. At the time of harvest, when they cut and tie up the grain, each slave gets a bundle of the different sorts of grain, about a bushel of our measure, for himself. The grain on his ground is entirely left for his own use, and he may dispose of it as he thinks proper.67

Clapperton’s observations confirm the essential features of plantation organization. The main field belonged to the master, with separate gardens for the use of slave families. Usually after the 4:00 p.m. prayer, slaves worked their own gardens, unless there were special assignments on the master’s land. Some of
the provisioning was the responsibility of the master, including the bundle of grain from the main field, and almost certainly the midday meal that broke the day’s labor. Slaves were expected to feed themselves except during the time when they were actually employed on the master’s behalf. Masters normally provided one item of clothing per year for each slave and a spouse for young people born into slavery, as well as those first-generation slaves who had proved themselves. In all cases, slave children belonged to their mother’s master, and he could assign them tasks that would remove them from their parents. In most communities, the sale of slave children was rare. Public opinion was strongly against sale of those born into slavery. Legally, masters still had the right to sell, but it was usually exercised only in cases related to the settlement of a debt, inheritance decisions in which the master’s family could not divide the slaves evenly among children, or bad behavior on the part of individual slaves.

During the rainy season, the principal labor was fieldwork. The slaves often worked in gangs under an overseer who was usually a slave himself. Failure to work hard enough or other insubordination was punished severely, often by whipping, being tied up in the sun, or being placed in irons. Ultimately, difficult slaves were sold. During the dry season, there were many other activities, including house building and repair. Houses were made from mud-bricks, which deteriorated in the rains. Roofs, too, had to be patched or made anew. Slaves also made mats, baskets, and cornstalk beds, transported manure to the fields, and loaded animals for caravan trading. Sometimes slaves were assigned petty trading on their master’s account, and many slaves, perhaps most, were involved in textile production. Female slaves spun thread and male slaves wove. In all these activities, slaves often had time to pursue a craft or trade on their own, and some of the cloth or thread they produced could be sold for their own profit. Occasionally, masters allowed slaves even more time to work for themselves, in exchange for a cash payment in cowries or other currency. Slaves who were able to save money could apply to purchase their freedom. But there were many obstacles to emancipation, including the difficulty of buying the freedom of spouses and children and the hardships of old age, when the master would no longer be responsible. Even when slaves did secure their freedom, they often remained close to the former master’s household, becoming a client of the master instead of a slave. As a consequence, some slaves – at least in Malinke society – chose to buy slaves of their own rather than to purchase their own freedom. Technically, the slave of a slave still belonged to the master, but custom allowed the slave to benefit from his own property.

Throughout the savanna where slave plantations were important agricultural produce was distributed both locally and over considerable distances. The local economy depended on the movement of goods because harvest could vary from year to year. The general pattern involved the transport of grain northward toward the desert, where local conditions could be extremely good in a particular year but where there was a predictable demand for grain among the desert nomads, trans-Saharan merchants, and farmers whose crops had
failed. When local harvests in areas near the desert were very good, grain could be sent south or north, but these supplies could not be counted on every year. Consequently, many plantation owners along the southern edge of the Sahara settled slaves at several locations over a wide area. This provided some insurance against local crop failure, and it also permitted herds of livestock to be moved from one location to another, grazing on the stubble fields after harvest and in the process manuring the soil for the next planting season. Often desert nomads had plantations far to the south, located on the routes to savanna markets where livestock, desert salt, dates, and trans-Saharan imports were sold and where textiles, leather goods, and grain could be purchased cheapest. The nomads grazed their herds near these plantations while they traded. The presence of these herds in the savanna economy was a source of cheap transport. Camels, oxen, and donkeys were available to move farm produce, particularly grain and cotton, within the savanna.

In the central emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, for example, cotton and grain were transported into the heavily populated textile belt of Kano and Zaria, which also produced cotton and grain, but not enough to supply the local market. The textile industry supplied much of West Africa, although there were many other textile centers elsewhere. The Maraka towns of Sinsani, Nyamina, and Banamba also were important, and the pattern was not so different there. The spinning and weaving of cloth, largely done by slave women and men respectively, had to be organized over an extensive area in order to supply the dyeing centers. In the Sokoto Caliphate, raw cotton was sometimes moved several hundred kilometers to places where it was spun and woven, and the cloth was then transported another hundred kilometers or more to the dyeing centers. The finished cloth was then exported widely.

The crops grown on the savanna plantations included millet, sorghum, cotton, indigo, cow peas, peanuts, and tobacco. The staples were grown during the rainy season on land that was sown shortly after the first rains, either in late May or June, depending on the year and the latitude. Other crops were planted on low-lying land or along river beds and relied on irrigation. These fields were often quite small, no more than gardens, but their output was significant because these lands were the source of wheat, cassava, tobacco, indigo, onions, peppers, and many vegetables and condiments. The irrigated plots often produced well into the dry season. Because of the different harvest times for grain, cotton, and irrigated produce, there was work for most of the year. The initial planting of grain was a peak period, because the labor of breaking the barren ground, even when some moisture had returned with the rains, was very heavy. Ridges and occasionally mounds were constructed on which the millet and sorghum were planted. These protected the shoots from being washed away during the torrential storms that characterized the rainy season and also retained water around the roots, despite the heavy runoff after each shower. Subsequently, there were two or more weedings, at which time the ridges and mounds were reconstructed. The work on both irrigated gardens and the grain
and cotton fields was done with a small, short-handled hoe. Irrigation was most frequently done with the *shadduf*, which in its most simple design included a container, usually a calabash or gourd, hanging by a rope on a pole that could be lowered to a water source, either a pond or pits hollowed out of a dry riverbed. If necessary, water was also carried to the irrigated plots.

Treatment of slaves could be severe. The account of an escaped slave seized at Keffi, one of the towns near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers, demonstrates this. At the orders of the town’s official the slave was stripped of the clothes he had stolen and “sent to work in his plantations.” The slave, depressed at his inability to carry off his escape, proved to be a poor field hand: “And thus, when I failed to do good work, I got many a flogging from the overseer of the governor’s plantation; and one day it was said to me that as I was a worthless slave I should be sold in the market.”\(^7\) In cases of continued disobedience, such as the one reported here, slaves were sold and taken elsewhere. Because slaves knew well the risks involved in travel, they often feared this form of punishment above all others.

When the French administrator for Bamako investigated plantation slavery in the early years of the French occupation, he found that:

[S]laves are poorly fed, mistreated, and poorly clothed. Masters rarely give them their two days free (which is theirs) by custom. They prefer to feed them poorly and to be assured all their labor all the time…. Moko Tala, a slave of Touba, belongs to a master who “generously” gives three *moules* of millet [about six kilograms] for the rations of twenty-five slaves. The *services administratifs* estimated that a daily ration is one kilogram per person per day. Another slave called Hinebahafe Konati, also of Touba, told us that the twenty slaves of his master were given four kilograms per day.\(^7\)

Certainly conditions varied over the century and in different places, but whether or not slaves were treated as badly as those interviewed by Brevié, plantation slaves were involved in productive activities that demonstrate a type of slave regime that was far different from the stereotype of a benign African slavery.

**Slavery in the Sahel**

The sahel and southern Sahara was a region of specialized production and trade that relied extensively on slave labor. For ecological reasons, the inhabitants of this region had to be mobile; even farming populations were usually involved in trade for part of their livelihood, and when rains failed or were inadequate, people had to move elsewhere, at least temporarily. Population tended to concentrate around oases or valleys that had relatively easy access to water, and in these locations agriculture could be very productive. Millet especially grew well, so that farmers usually found themselves with a surplus to trade, unless the farmers were servile and were expected to provide substantial amounts of grain to their masters. Other farmers hunted ostriches, collected gum arabic, raised livestock, or produced salt, which tied them into
the commercial economy yet again. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, demand increased for commodities, either as exports to Europe (gum arabic, hides and skins, ostrich feathers) or as exports to the savanna (salt, livestock, grain). For those individuals who could control producers, either through slavery or other means, the nineteenth century was a period of relative prosperity.

The Moors, who lived to the north of the Senegal River, employed slaves in virtually every economic activity. Slaves cultivated millet in the flood plains of the retreating rivers and streams; they gathered gum arabic, the main export to Europe; they fetched water for livestock; they dug wells; and they gathered dry dung and wood for cooking. Caillié observed the collection of gum arabic in 1821, which was organized in gangs under the supervision of several marabouts, or free Muslims. A central camp was situated at the site of a well, where:

[T]he slaves cut straw to make huts; a single marabout superintends the slaves of his whole family, or of several of his friends; and he assembles them all, sometimes to the number of forty or fifty under the same hut. Every marabout sends as many slaves as he can spare…. The slaves fill their leather bags with water every morning, and furnished with a great forked stick, they traverse the fields in search of gum; as the gum-bearing trees are all thorny, this stick is used to knock off from the higher branches the lumps of gum which could not be reached by hand. As they pick it up they put it in their leather bags; and thus they spend the day, without any thing but a little water to refresh them…. The superintending marabout receives a proportion of the gum; the slaves work five days for their master, and the sixth for the superintendent, who thus comes in for the greater part of the produce.72

The export of gum was as important as the export of slaves by 1800; the volume of the trade continued to expand, reaching record levels in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.

Elsewhere along the southern edge of the desert, nomadic merchants and stock breeders also owned large numbers of slaves acquired in raids and through trade with the savanna. Slaves performed virtually all of the hard labor, including well construction and the watering of animals, the collection of manure and brush for fires, and the minding of herds of goats, sheep, and other animals. They loaded and unloaded the camels, prepared food, and waited on their masters. The servile farming population provided resting places for the nomads during livestock movements and caravan expeditions. The nomads themselves were engaged in livestock production and trade, which were closely integrated activities because herds had to be moved to obtain water and pasture. This necessity was turned to advantage for the purposes of trade. Camels and oxen could be loaded with salt and dates in the desert and driven south, where the animals could be pastured and the salt and dates sold. Grain, textiles, and other goods could then be taken back north into the desert, and while the livestock were in the savanna they could be used to transport local produce. Slave estates were vital staging points for integrating commercial activities that involved importing salt and dates, purchasing
grain and textiles, and selling transport services locally. In addition, the desert nomads made their animals available to the trans-Saharan trade and traded in slaves as well as “legitimate” goods.\textsuperscript{73}

The Tichit Moors dominated the salt trade from Ijil to Sinsani, Banamba, and other Maraka towns. One family, Haidara, operated salt caravans from Ijil through Banamba. Mulay al-Mahdi Haidara, for example, was a Sharif from the Oued Noun who traded throughout the Hodh in the 1850s. He then moved to Tichit and concentrated on wholesale trading; his sons became his agents in the towns to the south. Slaves were settled at Banamba to farm and conduct business for the family. These slaves took caravans to Ijil and Tichit to collect salt, which was later sold wholesale to Juula merchants. The Haidara salt caravans traveled to Gumbu, Nara, Nioro, Balle, Tichit, Nema, Walata, and Segala-Sokolo.\textsuperscript{74}

The desert-side trade periodically threw off migrants as a result of drought, localized hardship, or business opportunities. In the 1890s, for example, 3,000 people, many of whom had been slaves, left Tichit and other parts of the sahel because of drought in 1889. Many of these ex-slaves, the Maxanbinnu, settled at Nioro, Murja, Sanamba, Tienbugu, Kita, and Banamba and became agents in the trade between the desert and savanna. They had received their freedom in Tichit when drought conditions became severe. Some of these migrants became prosperous merchants and cultivators, such as the Sibi family, which was of Soninke origin. Some members of the family settled at Nema, where they acquired date-palm groves worked by slaves. Other kin moved to Banamba in the early 1890s, where they conducted a trade in salt, peanuts, grain, cloth, and hides and skins. The Banamba residents, too, employed slaves, including some who farmed.\textsuperscript{75}

The principal groups of Tuareg along the southern edge of the Sahara were the Kel Air (comprised of the Kel Ewey, Kel Tamat, Kel Fadey, and Kel Ferwan), the Kel Tademekket and Tingeregif (in the region of Timbuktu), and the Iwallammedan (including the Kel Attaram in the west and the Kel Dinnik in the east). There were other Tuareg centered in the Sahara (Kel Ajjer, Kel Ahaggar, and Kel Adragh or Ifogha), but they were less numerous than those operating in the sahel. Among the southern Tuareg, 70 to 90 percent of the population was servile, and many of these servile people were slaves (\textit{iklan}) or freed slaves.\textsuperscript{76}

There were three principal corridors of trade and production in the central Sudan; one dominated by the Kel Ewey, another by the Kel Gress, and a third by the Kel Dinnik. A class of aristocrats (\textit{imajeren}) had nearly exclusive control of wealth and power that was accumulated through the domination of the different strata in the social formation. The \textit{imajeren}, who constituted about 10 percent of the Tuareg population, acted as if they were managers of large firms with quasipolitical jurisdiction. They alone decided on war and peace; from their ranks came the political leaders; and they were the main patrons of the Muslim clerics. The use of the Tuareg language (Tamashek) effectively served
as a specialized language that helped these nomads maintain the desert-side sector as a distinct network within the larger region of the central Sudan.\(^7\)

The Kel Ewey Tuareg, for example, operated from the Air Massif, which was conveniently located on the major trans-Saharan route north from the Sokoto Caliphate to Ghat, Ghadames, and North Africa. Along with hides and skins, ostrich feathers, gold, and other goods, several thousand slaves a year were exported along this route in the nineteenth century. The Kel Ewey were a major link in this network because they provided much of the camel transport, but “legitimate” trade and slave exports were only one aspect of their economy. These nomads had many camels, horses, cattle, goats, and sheep, and the sale of animals provided a large portion of their income. They were also involved in the salt and date trade, traveling several hundred kilometers to the east of the Air Massif to the salt oases of Kawar and Fachi, where they sold grain and manufactures for the salt cones and cakes of Bilma and other salt sites. This salt they transported to the savanna markets, particularly Zinder, Katsina, and Kano.\(^7\)

Tuareg social structure was characterized by gradations of status: Below the aristocrats were various categories of dependents, including tenant farmers, herders who worked on contract, vassals, and slaves. The status of each depended on the position held in the larger desert-edge system, and each was attached to a specific noble or group of nobles. Dependent groups of nomads received livestock from the nobles under a variety of contracts, and they were allowed to breed their own herds – but usually not camels.

Tuareg nobles settled slaves in the Air Massif and Damergu to the immediate south; they also had estates farther south in Tessawa, Damagaram, and elsewhere. In the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, the Kel Ewey leader (anastafidet), for example, had estates in the Air Massif and elsewhere, whereas the Imezureg, whose wealth in the late nineteenth century derived from the collection of ostrich feathers for the trans-Saharan trade, had a similar network. Iklan belonging to the anastafidet lived in several villages near Olelewa; not far away were the estates worked by slaves of the Imezureg, whose capital was at Gangara.\(^7\)

The Tuareg allowed their plantation slaves an amazing degree of movement. To some extent this was a natural feature of the environment. Slaves had to be free to move in case of drought, but the Tuareg allowed even greater liberty. Many of their slaves also traded, either for their masters or on their own account. Heinrich Barth, who traveled with a Tuareg caravan in 1850, visited one plantation near Tessawa. The estate belonged to Annur, one of the leading Kel Ewey figures in the nineteenth century and the leader of Barth’s caravan:

The estate is very extensive, and consists of a great many clusters of huts scattered over the fields, while isolated dumpalms give the whole a peculiar feature. The people, all followers and mostly domestic slaves of Annur, seemed to live in tolerable ease and comfort, as far as I was able to see, my companion introducing me into several huts. Indeed,
every candid person, however opposed to slavery he may be, must acknowledge that the
Tawarek in general, and particularly the Kel owi, treat their slaves not only humanely,
but with the utmost indulgence and affability, and scarcely let them feel their bondage
at all. Of course there are exceptions.\textsuperscript{80}

Barth visited other Tuareg plantations on his journey, and he was surprised to
find these located far to the south, in Katsina and Kano emirates in the heart
of the savanna. These included estates owned by Annur and his brother, Elaiji.
These brothers controlled the movement of thousands of camels and owned
estates at Kazaure, Gezawa, Zinder, Damergu and the Air Massif, as well as at
Tessawa.

The Tuareg allowed many of their slaves to pursue an occupation. Some
slaves, once they had proven their loyalty, were given animals to herd, and as
an incentive, the slaves were given a share in new animals and the right to dairy
products. Settled slaves, who lacked close supervision for much of the year,
were allowed to trade on their own account. The Tuareg even gave them goods
to retail, especially salt and dates. Eventually, slaves might purchase their free-
dom and invest in caravan trade.

Many of the inhabitants of the most southerly estates of the Tuareg were
\textit{irewelen}, freed slaves who had been allowed to emigrate from the sahel but
who maintained some contact with their former masters, often providing free
accommodation and nominal tribute. These \textit{irewelen} were particularly numer-
ous in Katsina, Kano, and Zamfara, where many were called “Agalawa” or
“people of the south.” These freedmen and their descendants became prosper-
ous merchants in their own right.\textsuperscript{81}

Some \textit{irewelen} were nomadic, receiving livestock from their former masters
on contract in much the same way that vassal groups of nomads often did.
They tended these livestock, taking a portion of new stock and selling the dairy
products of the herd as compensation. The nobles told these \textit{irewelen} where
to herd, and whenever the nobles wanted livestock to sell or to replenish their
own herds, they took their animals. This system allowed the class of nobles to
safeguard their own interests. In times of plenty, they distributed livestock to
their dependents; in hard times, they took their animals back and indirectly
forced their clients to emigrate. Slavery was essential to this system, for slavery
was a principal means of acquiring new dependents who could be allowed to
work their way up through the ranks. In the meantime, slaves performed most
of the work for the nobles, including the care of livestock in the nobles’ camps,
constructing and maintaining wells, and farming.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Assimilation of Slaves}

Despite the prevalence of plantation slavery and other economic uses for
slaves, many slaves could hope to achieve their freedom through hard work or
emancipation from a pious owner, and some slaves actually were freed. This
patriarchal aspect of slavery was part of the Islamic tradition of slavery. Even
some plantation slaves had opportunities that permitted social mobility. Hence
the dichotomy between plantation slavery and other forms of slavery was not
always a sharp one. Whereas the trend was toward the greater exploitation of
slaves, the administrative and domestic uses attest to a resilience of social and
political institutions that was remarkably different from practices in plantation
America.

Because so many slaves were women, one feature of slavery in the Muslim
savanna was the assimilation of females through concubinage and marriage
and the automatic emancipation of children by slave women, if the master
accepted paternity. Martin Klein’s analysis of the French census data on slav-
ery in the western Sudan has shown that female slaves often outnumbered
male slaves by two to one, although this was not always the case.\(^3\) In those
cercles for which an attempt was made to tabulate the number of men, women
and children, female slaves were more numerous than males. In a sample of
345,400 slaves, women formed 39.3 percent of the population, whereas the
comparable proportions for males and children were 30.9 percent and 29.8
percent respectively (see Table 9.1). Klein argues that women were probably
underrepresented in the sample, because those concubines and slave wives who
had given birth may well have been excluded from the census. Nonetheless, by
1904, many slaves had escaped, and escapees more often than not were males;
hence it is not possible to determine to what extent women were more numer-
ous than men. Women formed 56 percent of the adult population of 244,300
slaves recorded in the census. Even though marriage and concubinage did serve
as avenues leading to emancipation and assimilation, the sexual imbalance
appears still to have existed.

Those women who were not concubines or wives of free men worked as
hard as male slaves, and sometimes at the same tasks. While a sexual division
of labor was common in textile production and farming, women were still
expected to work as many hours as men, and because of child rearing and
food preparation many women probably worked longer than men. Spinning
and carding of cotton, for example, was a woman’s occupation, but it took a
woman eight hours to spin enough thread to keep a male slave weaving for
an hour. Among the Maraka, the cultivation of indigo was woman’s work,
because women did the dyeing, but in many villages, both men and women
worked in the fields, although usually not together. Men planted cotton; women
harvested it.

Many savanna-based merchants were servile in origin but became prosper-
ous men, owning many slaves of their own. These merchants adopted corpo-
rate names for themselves that revealed their origins but also provided a means
of identification that proved useful in business. The more important of these
groups in the central Sudan were the Agalawa, Tokarawa, and Adarawa.\(^4\)
These merchants spoke Hausa as their first language, not the Tuareg tongue.
Their homes were in or around the Hausa towns of the Sokoto Caliphate
Slavery in the Savanna During the Era of the Jihads

or the adjacent Hausa towns in the stretch of independent territory between the Caliphate and the Air Massif to the north. Many traded to Asante and Adamawa, dealing in kola nuts, salt, textiles, slaves, and other goods. Some amassed so many slaves that they established their own plantations. They did not treat their own slaves with the same leniency as the Tuareg. There was no reason to do so. It was possible to manage these slaves more closely, despite the itinerant trade in which merchants were involved, and as a result they allowed less autonomy for their slaves. After all, the humble origins of these merchants had necessitated hard work. Frugality in business and the desire for social mobility in caliphate society were not compatible with a particularly generous policy toward slavery. Instead, the Agalawa, Tokarawa, and Adarawa drove their slaves, using plantation output to provision their business operations and selling surplus on the market in order to raise more capital for their trade.

There are many examples of the gradual change in status of domestic slaves. It was possible for slaves in merchant households to acquire enough expertise and trust to operate on their master’s account. A leading Hausa merchant in Abeche, the late-nineteenth-century capital of Wadai, is a case in point. This man, Hasan Babalay, settled in Abeche sometime in the 1880s and established a flourishing commerce in slaves, ivory, livestock, ostrich feathers, textiles, kola nuts, and other goods. At the height of his business, he had twenty slave assistants in his firm, some of whom were responsible for caravans traveling to the slave-raiding lands south of Wadai, and one who accompanied a caravan across the Sahara. Babalay’s business extended to Kordofan and Dar Fur in the east, Dar Runga and Dar Sila in the south, Bagirmi, Borno, and the Sokoto Caliphate in the west, and Cairo and Tripoli in the north. His use of slave assistants was part of a long-standing commercial tradition in Islamic Africa, and even when a trusted slave stole his capital in one trans-Saharan venture, he continued to rely on domestic slaves.

Indeed, Babalay’s ancestry conveys the true dimensions of this tradition of commercial apprenticeship, for he was of Agalawa descent. His family apparently came from Kano Emirate, where many other Agalawa merchants also lived. Babalay established his business in distant Abeche in the 1880s, where he joined the prosperous, slave-owning merchant class of the Wadai capital. The successful operation of his firm required more than a staff of trusted assistants. To feed clients, slaves in transit, and the numerous pilgrims who also lodged at his house in Abeche, Babalay needed large quantities of foodstuffs. Again, commercial tradition dictated that much of this produce had to be grown on his own lands, undoubtedly by slave labor. Resident brokers housed visiting merchants free, in the expectation of profit from commission sales. Babalay had wives and concubines, thirty in all, to oversee this aspect of his business. We do not know how many slaves he had in the countryside, but it could easily have been hundreds, to judge by a comparison with the holdings of other successful merchants.
Beside their importance in commerce, slaves continued to be employed in the army, administration, and domestic service in the nineteenth century. The long tradition of such practices reserved a place for slaves in government and society, whether Muslim or Christian. It appeared to H. Salt, as he traveled through Ethiopia in the early nineteenth century, that:

The situation of slaves is rather honorable than disgraceful ... and the difference between their state and that of Western slaves is strikingly apparent. They have no long voyage to make, no violent change of habits to undergo, no outdoor labor to perform, no “white man’s scorn” to endure, but on the contrary, are frequently adopted, like children, into the family.  

Because this aspect of slavery was important, women and children continued to be in greater demand than men, despite the economically more significant function that men could perform. Nonetheless, most slaves still found themselves in an unenviable position, as a nineteenth-century tradition from Dar Fur makes clear:

The slaves must do the work in the house; if they are unwilling to work they must be beaten with the whip or must be beaten with the stick. Then they begin to cry [and] be willing to work. Their language is difficult; people don’t understand them. If we find a girl among them, who pleases us, then she doesn’t need to do any housework. I make her my wife, so that we can sleep together in bed and “eat the skin,” so that we will have children. Then she becomes pregnant and has a child. If it is a boy, then everything is fine.

Slaves performed the menial labor of the household, except for the pretty females, who became the wives or concubines of the master. This practice was traditional in Islamic society, being no different than the customs that prevailed in the savanna from the medieval era until European colonialism ended slavery. There was no room for insubordination in either situation; servants had to perform their daily tasks, and women had to accept their sexual subjugation to the master. There was room for emancipation in Islamic society, as there always had been. For the woman, the birth of a child, even if not the desired male, brought eventual freedom. For the servant, hard work, some intelligence, and much loyalty were rewarded with greater responsibilities and de facto change in status, whether or not the master chose to grant legal freedom.

Emancipation, recognized as a pious act and therefore very common in societies dedicated to a renewal of faith, was a feature of savanna slavery that distinguished it from other slave systems. Deathbed grants, court decrees, arrangements for self-purchase, ransoming, and the freeing of concubines with children were common practices. Hence, masters could arrange to free those slaves who assisted on caravan journeys and who could be trusted to act as agents. Similarly, slaves who traded on their own account could be allowed to purchase their freedom by paying regular installments. The status of slave officials placed them in a category of persons that for most purposes should be included as “free.” That slave officials were not technically free related to their
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constitutional position. They held appointments that were defined as slave and that were not open to freeborn citizens. Nonetheless, their status should not be confused with that of most slaves, who never had access to such privileges.

In allowing slaves to earn a private income, masters recognized that the ownership of slaves had advantages other than the direct exploitation of their labor. In Bauchi, for example, slaves could hire themselves out by paying a fixed sum of cowries – 50, 100, or 300 – to their master each week or month, and for a sum of 5,000 cowries a slave could be free to work on his own for a whole year.88 In the western Sudan, the amount paid to the master under similar arrangements varied widely. A Wolof slave paid about 35 kg of millet, whereas a Soninke slave was responsible for almost ten times that amount (337 kg). Klein has calculated that the average was 200 to 300 kg, roughly equivalent to the amount of grain needed to feed an adult in a year.89

The range of uses to which slaves were put and the various avenues to freedom within Muslim society illustrate the particular operation of slavery as an institution in the northern savanna. But the context for these practices must be kept in mind. Most slaves not only lacked special privileges but also lived close to the subsistence level. They worked hard in the fields during the rainy season, spun and wove cotton during the dry season, carried firewood, repaired and built houses, and dug wells. They were granted their own plots and allowed to raise small livestock, but they were also expected to feed themselves when they were not working on the main plantation fields. Extra earnings from retail trading were reduced through payments to their masters, and even their free day or two per week could be canceled when necessary. The possibilities of social mobility, however, still existed, in large part because newly captured slaves were readily available. Islamic norms encouraged emancipation, but the distinguishing feature of slavery in the northern savanna was the close relationship between the practice of slavery and the availability of more slaves. Slaves could be freed because slaves were cheap and could be easily replaced.

Slavery on the Periphery

There were areas in the savanna where slavery was not particularly important, even in the nineteenth century. In the regions of the upper Volta basin, for example, slaves do not appear to have constituted a significantly large proportion of the population. The aristocracy of the small Mossi states had some slaves; these were concentrated in household establishments, although a few of the wealthiest members of the elite had villages of slaves that can be compared with the plantations common elsewhere in the Muslim savanna. The Muslim merchants of these Mossi states also bought slaves for their own households, and these slaves were most probably employed in a manner similar to other parts of the Islamic savanna, that is, for agriculture, domestic chores, textile production, and commercial agency. Blacksmiths, too, bought a few slaves to perform menial tasks if male or to become wives if female. Even the great
expansion in slave raiding that occurred on the frontiers surrounding these Mossi communities does not seem to have affected the course of slavery there. Most of the slaves captured in the wars of Babatu and other warlords – especially among the Gurunsi – were sent south to Asante. Few appear to have been incorporated into local society. The peasant communities scattered through this region did not possess many slaves either. These peasants were more a source of slaves than employers of slaves. In times of famine and feud, slaves were exported, whereas the centers of political power, located in such towns as Sansanne Mango and Gambaga, were focal points for slave raiding into the countryside. Many of these towns recognized the political sovereignty of Asante until 1874, and slaves were forwarded to Kumasi as tribute.

Beyond the borders of the Islamic states, in the hill retreats of independent peasants, in walled towns of ousted aristocracies, and on the plains of the savanna, hidden by the vastness of space, were people who practiced forms of slavery that differed from the Islamic norm. These were the people who were subjected to slave raids and the expansive wars of the *jihad* states. Many were forced into tributary relationships. Others found themselves dependent on the very states they fought. Slavery appears to have been found everywhere, but the incidence was much lower than near the Islamic centers. The legal perception of the institution was based sometimes on kinship and sometimes on Islam, and the rate of assimilation varied. It is likely that the types of slavery found in these more segmentary societies were exceedingly old. A crucial dimension of this institution, however, was its marginality, in the sense that slavery among such people as the Margi, who lived on the borders of the Sokoto Caliphate, permitted the sale of individuals in times of crisis to maintain their independence from the Islamic states. Often the Margi and other people on the frontiers of the major states were forced to fight each other over scarce resources, including people who were passed on as tribute, so that the interaction between these societies and the Islamic states could be indirect and complex. Slavery was a vital institution in this relationship. It allowed the tight control over land and other resources among people who faced the perpetual danger of raids, famine, and the unexpected inability to trade for necessities. Enslavement and the slave trade connected the dominant pattern of slavery in the Islamic states with these peripheral areas. To consider them in isolation is to miss a fundamental feature that has influenced the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims of the savanna country for centuries.